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ABSTRACT

A study of graduate student recruitment practices was conducted in the spring of 1986 to determine the current practice of graduate schools and to determine the extent to which they are using marketing techniques. The members of the Council of Graduate Schools were surveyed; 250 graduate schools responded (69% response rate). Questions concerned the effectiveness of recruitment programs, responsibility for recruitment financial and personnel resources for recruitment, and evaluation of recruitment efforts. Ratings of selected recruitment strategies and marketing techniques were requested. Among the results presented and discussed here are the following: the most cost effective recruitment strategies were considered to be personal contact, publications, and financial assistance, among others; and a significant relationship was found between the effectiveness of a recruitment program and the presence of professional recruitment personnel. Based on the results of this study and the literature reviewed, a model for graduate student recruitment was developed. Each of the following steps in the model is discussed: (1) assessment (analysis of the institution, the students, the "competition," and the job market); (2) developing recruitment and enrollment objectives; (3) developing recruitment plans and recruitment strategies to meet the above objectives (involving academic and financial considerations, publicity and advertising, segmentation of the student market, and other factors); (4) implementing a recruitment program; and (5) monitoring and evaluating the recruitment program. (KM)

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Graduate Student Recruitment

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As part of her dissertation research last year, Dean Baron surveyed CGS members on graduate student recruitment practices. This report contains the results of her research.

Although graduate student enrollments have remained relatively steady over the past several years, recruitment of graduate students is still of concern to graduate deans. The literature on institutional marketing and student recruitment has grown dramatically in recent years. Although most of it has centered on undergraduate student recruitment and enrollment management, there has been evidence of increasing interest in the utilization of marketing techniques in graduate student recruitment.

A study of graduate student recruitment practices was conducted in the spring of 1986 to ascertain the current practice of graduate schools and to determine the extent to which they are utilizing marketing techniques. The members of the Council of Graduate Schools were surveyed and 250 graduate schools responded (a response rate of 69%). Graduate deans were asked about the effectiveness of their recruitment program, responsibility for recruitment, resources (financial and personnel) devoted to recruitment, and evaluation of recruitment efforts. The survey also listed sixteen recruitment strategies and nine marketing techniques. Respondents also were asked to rate their use of these techniques and their effectiveness.

The recruitment strategies used most often were:

(1) to provide financial assistance through scholarships, grants or the awarding of assistantships and fellowships;

(2) to develop and distribute a graduate school publication designed to describe in general the graduate school, each college or school and the graduate programs offered;

(3) to develop and distribute promotional material featuring specific programs, related research and faculty and student achievements;

(4) to develop and distribute informative materials describing financial aid assistance for graduate students;

(5) to utilize personal contact, e.g., telephone calls and personal visits by faculty, to recruit promising students; and

". . . graduate education needs to do a better job of educating undergraduates, and the general public, about what graduate education is and the difference a graduate education can make for a student."

(6) to utilize professional guides, e.g., *Peterson's Guides, Graduate Programs Manual*, etc. to promote graduate offerings.

The most effective recruitment strategies included:

(1) providing financial assistance through scholarships, grants or the awarding of assistantships and fellowships;

(2) utilizing personal contact, e.g., telephone calls, personal visits by faculty, to recruit promising students;

(3) cultivating and maintaining close contact with colleagues at other institutions to exchange referrals on prospective students;

(4) developing and distributing promotional materials featuring specific programs, related research and faculty and student achievements;

(5) providing for the most outstanding applicants to visit the campus with expenses subsidized by the institution visited, and

(6) developing and distributing a graduate school publication designed to describe in general the graduate school, each college or school and graduate programs offered.

The recruitment strategies of providing financial assistance, distributing program-specific promotional materials and utilizing personal contact with students were listed among the most effective and the most often used strategies. Graduate deans know that financial assistance has always been a critical factor in determining whether a student attends graduate school so they continue to emphasize this factor. Promotional material centered on specific programs, related research and faculty and student achievements also meets critical student information needs. Personal contact with faculty also is effective because students can obtain the information they need and faculty can describe program and university factors which are appropriate to the student.

Respondents were also asked to rate nine marketing techniques for their usage and effectiveness in recruiting graduate students. The marketing techniques used most often were:

(1) institutional research—research on an institution's graduate students such as size of applicant pool, number and percentage admitted, sources of students, student attitudes;

(2) differentiation—introduction and emphasis of the features, qualities or benefits of an institution which differentiate its offerings from those of its competitors;

(3) recruiting information system—a system which provides timely, accurate and easily retrievable information about prospective students and recruitment activities.

The most effective marketing techniques were:

(1) differentiation;

(2) recruiting information system;

(3) market studies—research on demographic changes, future employment needs, sources of potential students and enrollment trends at other universities; and

(4) market positioning—the study of the structure of the market in order to identify a viable niche in which to locate one's institution and its offerings.

Two of the marketing techniques, differentiation and the recruiting information system, were judged among the most effective as well as most used. Both of these techniques are fundamental to a marketing or recruitment effort. The other two most effective marketing techniques—market studies and market positioning—require a more advanced marketing research effort and thus are not as widely used. Institutional research, the most often used of the marketing techniques, also is conducted for purposes in addition to recruitment, so it is not surprising that it is first on the usage list.

Overall, the marketing techniques studied were used less often than the recruitment strategies. Marketing is an institutional activity and cannot be undertaken effectively by one unit of the university in isolation from others. Graduate education has always been selective and until recently many programs have had a plentiful supply of well qualified applicants. The demographic changes affecting our nation will impact graduate programs later than undergraduate programs. In many instances, recruitment for graduate programs is a decentralized activity and involves smaller numbers and groups of applicants than is assumed in most marketing activities.

Respondents also were requested to list additional effective recruitment strategies and were asked to list the techniques they had found to be the most cost-effective and the least cost-effective in attracting students to their graduate programs. The respondents listed 133 additional recruitment strategies and techniques. Responses were grouped in the following categories: advertising/media (19), personal contact (17), tracking/follow-up (16), community/location (15), professional contacts (15), publications (10), target groups (10), mailings (8), financial assistance (7), and other (16).

The question concerning the most cost-effective recruitment strategies drew 215 responses. Responses fell into the following categories: personal contact (83), publications (37), financial assistance (15), advertising (14), professional contact (10), tracking/follow-up (10), fairs/career days (9), and other (37).

Examples of the least cost-effective recruitment strategies numbered 122. The responses were categorized as: travel (66), publications (57), advertising (13), and other (15). Many of the strategies cited as least cost-effective were very general efforts which were not focused in any way. For example, one of the least cost-effective efforts was travel without any prior preparation or contacts.

Some of the recruitment strategies and techniques were listed by some schools as most cost effective and by others as least cost effective. An example of a such a strategy is travel to graduate fairs or career days. There are many types of graduate fairs, forums and career days at different locations and with very different audiences. Some are campus-based while others are held at off-campus locations. Some fairs are focused exclusively on graduate schools while others include employment recruiters. A graduate school must know what type student it is seeking and the best way to get information to that student. Graduate programs in urban areas may find it cost-effective to advertise on radio during commuting hours. A school in a rural area may find such advertising to be unsuccessful. A regional institution with a large number of graduate programs in education will find it advantageous to cultivate good relations with school districts and teacher organizations. This same strategy would be unproductive for a graduate school with few programs in education. Effective graduate student recruitment requires knowledge of one's school and its programs, its strengths and weaknesses, the type of students one is trying to attract and the best ways to reach those students. For example, in this study, the comprehensive universities rated participation in Career/Professional Days as significantly more effective. In contrast, the doctorate-granting universities reported significantly higher effectiveness for such strategies as exchanging referrals with colleagues, subsidizing visits by applicants to their campuses, contacting their institutions' seniors, and providing financial assistance.

Seventy-one percent of the graduate schools responding to the survey were public institutions and 73 percent grant the doctorate. About 40 percent enrolled 1500 or fewer graduate students and 25 percent enrolled more than 3500 students. For a majority of the responding graduate schools (63 percent) part-time graduate students accounted for more than half of their graduate enrollment. The respondents were also classified according to the Carnegie Council's *Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* (1976). According to this classification scheme, just over one half were in the doctorate-granting category and 44 percent were classified as comprehensive universities.

Nearly 50 percent of the graduate schools had experienced an enrollment increase over the past five years and only seventeen percent reported a decrease over the same period. One-half of the respondents expect graduate enrollment to increase over the next five years and 44 percent expect it to remain the same.

At 54 percent of the graduate schools in this study the academic departments have the primary responsibility for the graduate student recruitment program. The graduate school has the primary recruitment responsibility at 23 percent of the schools. Only 19 percent of the graduate schools have a written plan for graduate student recruitment, with such a plan under development at an additional 10 percent of the graduate schools.

Fifteen percent of the respondents judged their graduate student recruitment program to be very effective, 50 percent rated it moderately effective and 21 percent judged their program to have little or no effect. Of the 38 institutions which rated their recruitment programs very effective, 73.7% were public and 26.3% were private, 21.1% were master's only and 78.9% were doctoral institutions. Thirty-one percent enrolled 1500 or fewer students, 39.4% enrolled 1501–2500 graduate students, 7.9% enrolled 2501–3500 students and 21% enrolled more than 3500 graduate students.

Seventy percent of the respondents reported utilizing some type of personnel in graduate student recruitment efforts. At 34 percent of the schools, the graduate dean is involved with graduate student recruitment, and at 43 percent, the associate or assistant graduate dean is assigned to graduate student recruitment. Twenty-seven percent reported using professional recruitment personnel and 28 percent used faculty to recruit

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graduate students. Only 22 percent of the responding graduate schools plan to add personnel over the next two years for the recruitment of graduate students.

A significant relationship was found between the effectiveness of a recruitment program and the presence of professional recruitment personnel. Forty-seven percent of the schools with a very effective recruitment program reported using professional recruitment personnel, whereas 84.6% of the schools that felt their programs were low on effectiveness did not have professional recruitment personnel.

Another significant relationship was found between the presence of professional recruitment personnel and the office responsible for graduate student recruitment. Among the graduate schools employing professional recruitment personnel for graduate student recruitment, 20.3% assign primary recruitment responsibility to the graduate school, 20.3% share it between the graduate school and academic departments, 14.1% assign it to an office for both undergraduate and graduate student recruitment and 45.3% report it is primarily an academic department responsibility. In contrast, at schools which do not utilize professional recruitment personnel, the academic departments bear the primary responsibility for graduate student recruitment. The graduate school and other offices have much less responsibility for recruitment at these institutions.

Training or instruction for persons involved in the recruitment of graduate students is provided at 16 percent of the responding schools and is under development at an additional nine percent. Faculty who participate in graduate student recruitment activities receive released time or extra remuneration at only 19 (8%) of the responding graduate schools.

Funding for graduate student recruitment activities comes from the university budget at the majority (75%) of the graduate schools. Almost half (46%) of the respondents reported an increase in resources devoted to graduate student recruitment at their institution over the past five years. Forty-three percent of the graduate schools reported little or no change in resources devoted to graduate student recruitment over the same period.

Over one-half of the responding schools (52%) reported that they do evaluate their graduate student recruitment program on a periodic basis. The criteria used most often for evaluation were the number of applicants and enrollees generated, followed by cost, time, staffing and student attitudes. The most commonly used evaluation techniques were statistical compilations (ranked first), followed by surveys, interviews and financial audits.

Based on the results of this study and the literature reviewed, a model for graduate student recruitment was developed. Graduate student recruitment is carried out at both the central (graduate school) level and the departmental level and this model is applicable to both levels. The role of the graduate school is to coordinate, facilitate, provide support and assist with the dissemination of material. The graduate school cannot replace personal contact with departmental faculty or the faculty's contacts with professional colleagues, but there are many areas in which it can provide support with general publications, guidance and data. It is important to establish a cooperative relationship between the graduate school and the academic departments for a successful graduate student recruitment program. The relationship between the graduate school and the academic departments is also determined by historical factors that differ at each institution. This model can be adapted to conform to these unique relationships.

The steps in the graduate recruitment model are:

1. **Assessment**

In this phase it is necessary to collect and analyze the data relevant to the information needed for recruitment. The problem must be clearly defined and then researched. Three major areas for analysis are:

a. institutional analysis—identify the institutional characteristics such as the strengths and weaknesses of academic programs, unique nonacademic programs, unique facilities, institutional philosophy and goals, financial and budget constraints, personnel resources, and other internal institutional factors.

b. student analysis—examine student characteristics, the prospective student pool in as many ways as possible, such as demographic and geographic; gather information on inquiries, applicants, admitted and enrolled students; examine the student decision-making process and influences on students during this process.

c. competitive analysis—identify competing institutions and competing departments or programs. An analysis of the job market as a competitor to graduate programs is also appropriate at this stage.

d. job market analysis—identify strengths and weaknesses in job market opportunities for graduates of graduate programs.

2. **Develop recruitment and enrollment objectives.**

These objectives should be defined clearly and concisely, and be quantified if possible. Factors to be considered include academic programs, financial considerations, including financial assistance, and student services.

3. **Develop a recruitment plan and recruitment strategies to meet the above objectives.**

The recruitment plan should address the issues of academic programs, financial considerations, including financial assistance, and promotion. Responsibilities for the activities must be assigned. The promotional techniques of publicity, advertising and personal selling are important. Included in this phase are design of recruitment literature and planning of training or orientation of staff involved in recruitment. Segmentation of the student market into distinct subsets, such as demographic or geographic groups, should be considered. This can be done for inquiries, applicant pool or other groups. Another factor to be considered is the institution's market position, establishing the unique qualities of the institution and its programs in relation to the competition. Among the possible recruitment strategies, personal contacts have proven to be most effective. Financial assistance is important, as are faculty contacts in professional networks.

4. **Implement recruitment program.**

Communication is a key ingredient in implementation. Activities are scheduled and carried out, literature is sent, responses are made to inquiries. The promotional techniques of advertising, publicity and personal selling are carried out. The medium of direct mail is often useful because it allows for a rational,

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logical sequence of messages. The careful follow-up of inquiries, applications, and acceptances can increase both the applicant pool and the yield of enrolled students. Systematic and consistent treatment over time yields results.

5. **Monitor and evaluate recruitment program.**

Monitoring and evaluation of the program will result in improvements and increased effectiveness. Refinements are made in the literature, objectives are revised, promotion and distribution policies are reassessed to determine whether they are meeting the needs. Evaluation techniques include interviews with enrolled students, surveys of enrolled and non-enrolled students, reports from alumni, cost/benefit analysis of various efforts, year-to-year comparisons of data, comparisons of conversion rates (inquiries to applications to admitted to enrolled). This information should all feed back to the beginning of the model and be used in the next recruitment cycle.

One of the conclusions reached as a result of this research and observations on the recruitment process is that graduate education needs to do a better job of educating undergraduates, and the general public, about what graduate education is and the difference a graduate education can make for a student. In marketing terminology, we need to sell our product. Many undergraduates aim for only the bachelor's degree and have no idea what opportunities can be opened up for them with a graduate degree. The proliferation of graduate (especially master's) degrees over recent decades makes our task even greater. Educating more potential students about the opportunities opened by a graduate degree is one way of increasing the applicant and maintaining certain levels of enrollment of qualified students. •